

The Devil's Own

A Romance of the Black Hawk War

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By RANDALL PARRISH

Author of "Contraband," "Shea of the Irish," "The Wagoner," "The Wagoner Was King," etc. ILLUSTRATIONS BY IRWIN MYERS

CHAPTER XIII—Continued.

"Whole caboodle workin' like a charm," he said, good humoredly. "Thought onct the deputy might show up ugly, but a quart o' red-eye sure fixed him—that's our party a comin' now. Ye're ter stay right whar ye are."

They were advancing toward us up the bank which sloped down toward the creek. Rale moved forward to meet them across the little open space, and a moment later, from my hiding place among the motionless horses I became able to distinguish the slowly approaching figures. There were four in the party, apparently from the garb two men and two women. The second man might be the preacher, but if so, why should he be there? Why should his presence at this time be necessary? Unless the two main conspirators had special need for his services, I could conceive no reason for his having any part in the action that night. Had I been deceived in their plans? Even as this fear overwhelmed me with consternation, I was compelled to notice how helplessly the first of the two women walked—as though her limbs refused to support her body, even though apparently upheld by the grip of the man beside her. Rale, joining them, immediately grasped her other arm, and, between the two, she was impelled forward. The saloonkeeper seemed unable to restrain his voice.

"Yer must'r give her one h— o' a dose," he growled, angrily. "Half o' thet wud a bin' nough. Why, d— it, she kin hardly walk."

"Well, what's the odds?" It was Kirby who replied sarcastically. "She got more because she wouldn't drink. We had to make her take it, and it wasn't no easy job. Gaskins will tell you that. Have you got your man here?"

"O' course; he's waitin' thar with the hosses. But I'm d— if I like this. She don't know nuthin', does she?"

"Maybe not now; but she'll come around all right, and she signed her name. So there ain't no hitch. She seemed to get worse after that. Come on, we can't stand talking here; let's get them off, Jack; there isn't any time to waste. I suppose we'll have to strap her into the saddle."

I held back, and permitted them to work, merely leading my own horse slightly to one side and keeping in his shadow. Gaskins brutally jerked the shrinking mulatto forward and forced her to mount one of the horses. She made some faint protest, the nature of which I failed to catch clearly, but the fellow only laughed in reply and ordered her to keep quiet. Eloise uttered no word, emitted no sound, made no struggle, as the two other men lifted her bodily into the saddle, where Kirby held her, swaying helplessly against him, while Rale strapped her securely into place.

The entire proceedings were so brutally cruel that it required all my strength of will to restrain myself from action. My fingers closed upon the pistol in my pocket, and every impulse urged me to hurl myself on the fellow, trusting everything to swift, bitter fight. I fairly trembled in eagerness to grapple with Kirby, hand to hand, and crush him helpless to the earth.

"Thar," said the saloonkeeper, at last, testing his strap. "I reckon she can't fall off nowhow, even if she don't sit up worth a d—, Go ahead now, Moffett."

Both men stepped aside, and I led my horse forward. The movement brought me more into the open, and face to face with Kirby. By some trick of fate, at that very instant a star-gleam, piercing through the screen of leaves overhead, struck full into my eyes. With an oath he thrust my hat back and stared straight at me.

I could not see the mingled hate and horror glaring in the man's eyes, but there could be no doubt of his recognition. The acknowledgment found expression in a startled exclamation.

"By God!—you, here!" That was all the time I gave him. With every pound of strength, with every ounce of dislike, I drove a clenched fist into that surprised face, and the fellow went down as though smitten by an ax. Even as he reeled, Rale leaped on me, cursing, falling to understand the cause, yet instinctively realizing the presence of an enemy. His grip was at my throat, and, even as his fingers closed savagely, he struck me with one knee in the stomach, and drove an elbow straight into my face. The next instant we were locked together so closely any blow became impossible, youth and agility waging fierce battle against brutal strength. I think I was his match, yet this I never knew—for all my thought centered in an effort to keep his hands from reaching any weapon. Whatever happened to me, there must be no alarm, no noise sufficiently loud so as to attract the attention of sentries on guard. This affair must be fought out with bare knuckles and straining sinews—fought in silence to the end. I held him to me in a bear grip, but his overmastering strength bore me backward, my body bending beneath the strain until every muscle ached.

"D— you—you sneakin' spy!" he hissed savagely, and his jaws snapped at me like a mad beast. "Let go! d— you—let go!"

Crazed by the pain, I swerved to one side, and half fell, my grip torn loose from about his arms, but as I instantly closing again around his lower body. He strained, but failed to break my grasp, and I should have hurled him over the hip, but at that second Gaskins struck me, and I went tumbling down, with the saloonkeeper falling flat on top of me, his pudgy fingers still clawing fiercely at my throat. It seemed as though consciousness left my brain, crushed into death



"D— You, You Sneakin' Spy!" He Hissed Savagely.

by those gripping hands, and yet the spark of life remained, for I heard the ex-preacher utter a yelp, which ended in a moan, as a blow struck him; then Rale was jerked off me, and I sobbingly caught my breath, my throat free. Into my dazed mind there echoed the sound of a voice.

"Is that 'nough, Jack?—then holler. D— yer, yer try thet again, an' I'll spill whut brains yet got all over this kintry. Yes, it's Tim Kennedy talkin', an' he's talkin' ter ye. Now yer lie whar yer are. Yer ain't killed, be ye, Knox?"

I managed to lift myself out of the dirt, still clutching for breath but with my mind clearing.

"No; I guess I'm all right, Tim," I said, panting out the words with an effort. "What's become of Kirby? Don't let him get away."

"I ain't likely to. He's a lyin' right whar yer dropped him. Holy smoke! sounded ter me like ye hit him with a pole-ax. I got his gun, an' thet's whut's makin' this skunk hold so blame still—oh, yes, I will, Jack Rale; I'm just a achin' fer ter let ye hav' it."

"And the other fellow? He hit me." "My ol' frien', Gaskins; thet's him, all right." The deputy gave vent to a short, mirthless laugh. "Oh, I rapped him with the butt; had ter do it. He'd got hold of a club somwhar, an' was goin' ter give yer another. It will be a while, I reckon, fore he takes much interest. Whut'll I do with this red-headed gink?"

I succeeded in reaching my feet, and stood there a moment, gaining what view I could through the darkness. The short struggle, desperate as it had been, was not a noisy one, and I could hear nothing about us to indicate any alarm. Kennedy had one hand pressed into Rale's abdomen and the star-rays reflected back the steel glimmer of the pistol held threateningly before the man's eyes. The horses beyond stood motionless, and the two women in the saddles appeared like silent shadows. I stood up once more, peering through the darkness and listening. Whatever was to be done I must decide, and quickly.

"Have Rale stand up, but keep him covered. Don't give him any chance to break away; now wait—there is a lariat rope hanging to this saddle; I'll get it."

It was a strong cord and of good length, and we proceeded to bind the fellow securely in spite of his objections, I taking charge of the pistol, while Tim, who was more expert, did the job in a workmanlike manner.

"Now gag him, Tim," I said quietly. "Yes, use the neckerchief. That will do; all we can hope for is a few hours' start."

"Is Kirby dead?" "I'm afraid not, but he has got an ugly bump and lost some blood; his head struck a rock when he fell. It will be a while, I imagine, before he wakes up. How about your man?"

He crossed over and bent down above the fellow, feeling with his hands in the darkness.

"I reckon he's a goner, cap," he admitted, as though surprised. "Gosh, I must'r hit the cuss harder than I thought—hair caved in his head, the pore devil. I reckon it's no great loss ter nobbody."

"But are you sure he is dead? That will put a different aspect on all this, Kennedy!" I exclaimed gravely, facing him as he arose to his feet. "That and the belief I now have that Kirby has

already consummated his plan of marriage with Miss Beaucaire."

"You mean he has—?" "Yes, that he has forced the girl to assent to some form of ceremony, probably legal in this country. I overheard enough between him and Rale to suspect it, at least, and she is even now under the influence of some drug. She hasn't spoken, nor does she seem to know what is going on about her. They strapped her into the saddle."

"The h— they did." "It has been a hellish affair all the way through, and the only way in which I can serve her, if this is so, is by getting her away—as far away as possible, and where this devil can never find her again. What bothers me right now is your case."

"Mine? Lord, what's the matter with me?" "Considerable, I should say. You can't be left here alone to face the result of this night's work. If Gaskins is dead from the blow you struck him these two fellows will swear your life away just for revenge. Even if you told the whole story, what chance would you have? That would only expose us, and still fail to clear you. It would merely be your word against theirs—you would have no witnesses, unless we were caught."

"I reckon thet's true; I wasn't thinkin' 'bout it." "Then there is only the one road to take, Tim," I insisted. "We've got to strike the trail together."

"Whar?" "I cannot answer that now; I haven't thought it out yet. We can talk that matter over as we ride. I have a map with me, which will help us decide the best course to choose. The first thing is to get out of this neighborhood beyond pursuit. If you only had a horse."

"That's two critters down in the crick bottom. I reckon thet Kirby an' Gaskins must'r tied 'em thar."

"Good; then you will go; you agree with me?"

"Thar ain't nuthin' else fer me ter do—hangin' ain't never bin' no hobby o' mine."

"Then let's start," decisively. "Pick up one of those horses down on the bottom and turn the other one loose. I'll lead on down the trail and you can meet us at the ford—once across the creek we can decide which way to travel; there must be four hours of darkness yet."

I picked up the trailing rein of my horse and slipped my arm through it. Tim faded away in the gloom like a vanishing shadow. The young woman next me, strapped securely to her saddle, made no movement, exhibited no sign of interest; her head and body drooped, yet her hands grasped the pommel as though she still retained some dim conception of her situation. The face under her hood was bent forward and shaded and her eyes, although they seemed open, gave no heed to my presence. I touched her hands—thank God, they were moist and warm, but when I spoke her name it brought no response.

I started forward on foot, leading my horse, the others trailing after through the darkness. Knowing nothing of the way, I was thus better able to pick the path, yet I found this not difficult, as it was rather plainly outlined by the forest growth on either side. The trail was clay with a few small stones embedded in it, and the horses made little noise in their descent, except once when Eloise's animal slipped and sent a loosened bit of rock rolling down to splash in some pool below. We came to the bank of the creek at last, a narrow stream, easily fordable, but with a rather steep shore line beyond, and waited there a moment until Tim emerged from out the black woods at our right and joined us. He was mounted, and, believing the time had arrived for more rapid movement, I also swung up into saddle and ranged the girl's horse beside mine.

They were not stock to be proud of, yet they did fairly well. Tim's mount evidently the best of the four. The going was decidedly better once we had topped the bank. We may have ridden for two miles without a word, for, although I had no intention of proceeding far in this direction, I could discover no opportunity for changing our course so as to baffle pursuit. That Kirby and Rale would endeavor to follow us at the earliest opportunity was most probable. They were neither of them the sort to accept defeat without a struggle, and, after the treatment they had received, the desire for revenge would be uppermost. Nor thus far would there be any difficulty in their picking up our trail, at least as far as the creek crossing, and this would assure them the direction we had chosen.

Then suddenly, out of the mysterious darkness which closed us in, another grove loomed up immediately in our front, and the trail plunged sharply downward into the depths of a rugged ravine. I was obliged to dismount and feel my way cautiously to the bottom, delighted to discover there was a smoothly flowing, narrow stream, running from the eastward between high banks, overhung by trees. It was a dismal, gloomy spot, a veritable cave of

darkness, yet apparently the very place I had been seeking for our purpose.

"Kennedy." "Right yer, str. Lord, but it's dark—found anything?" "There is a creek here. I don't know where it flows from, but it seems to come out of the east. One thing is certain, we have got to get off this trail. If we can lead the horses up stream a way and then circle back it would keep those fellows guessing for a while. Come here and see what you think of the chance."

"Ye let me go ahead with the nigger gurl, an' then follow after us, leadin' Miss Beaucaire's hoss. By Jeminy crickets, 'tain't deep' nough fer ter drown us enyway, an' I ain't much afereed o' the dark. Thar's likely ter be sum place whar we kin get out up thar. Whar the h— are them hosses?"

We succeeded in locating the animals by feeling and I waited on the edge of the bank, the two reins wrapped about my arm, until I heard the others go splashing down into the water. Then I also groped my own way cautiously forward, the two horses trailing behind me, down the sharply shelving bank into the stream. Tim close his course near to the opposite shore, and I followed his lead closely, guided largely by the splashing of Eloise's animal through the shallow water. Our movement was a very slow and cautious one, Kennedy halting frequently to assure himself that the passage ahead was safe. Fortunately the bottom was firm and the current not particularly strong, our greatest obstacle being the low-hanging branches which swept against us.

I think we must have waded thus to exceed a mile when we came to a fork in the stream and plumped into a tangle of uprooted trees, which ended our further progress. Between the two branches, after a little search, we discovered a gravelly beach, on which the horses' hoofs would leave few permanent marks. Beyond this gravel we plunged into an open wood, through whose intricacies we were compelled to grope blindly, Tim and I both afoot, and constantly calling to each other, so as not to become separated. I had lost all sense of direction, when this forest finally ended, and we again emerged upon open prairie, with a myriad of stars shining overhead.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Island in the Swamp.

The relief of thus being able to perceive each other and gain some view of our immediate surroundings after that struggle through darkness cannot be expressed in words. We were upon a rather narrow tongue of land, the two diverging forks of the stream closing us in. So, after a short conversation, we continued to ride straight forward, keeping rather close to the edge of the wood, so as to better conceal our passage. Our advance, while not rapid, was steady, and we must have covered several miles before the east began to show gray, the ghastly light of the new dawn revealing our tired faces. Ahead of us stretched an extensive swamp, with pools of stagnant water shimmering through lush grass and brown fringes of cat-tails bordering their edges. Some distance out in this desolation, and only half revealed through the dim light, a somewhat higher bit of land, rocky on its exposed side, its crest crowned with trees, arose like an island. Tim stared across at it, shading his eyes with one hand.

"If we was goin' ter stop enywhar, cap," he said finally, "I reckon thar ain't no better place then thet, pervidin' we kin git thar."

I followed his gaze, and noticed that the mulatto girl also lifted her head to look.

"We certainly must rest," I confessed. "Miss Beaucaire seems to be sleeping, but I am sure is thoroughly exhausted. Do you see any way of getting across the swamp?"

He did not answer, but Eloise instantly pointed toward the left, crying out eagerly:

"Sure, Ah do. The lan' is higher 'long thar, sah—yer kin see shale rock."

"So you can; it almost looks like a dyke. Let's try it, Tim."

It was not exactly a pleasant passage, or a safe one, but the continual increase in light aided us in picking our way above the black water on either hand. I let my horse follow those in front as he pleased and held tightly to the bit of the one bearing Eloise. The island proved a small one, not exceeding a hundred yards wide, rather sparsely covered with forest trees, the space between these thick with undergrowth. What first attracted my gaze after penetrating the tree fringe was the glimpse of a small shack, built of poles, and thatched with coarse grass, which stood nearly in the center of the island. It was a rudely constructed, primitive affair, and to all appearances deserted.

"Hold the horses here, Tim; let me see what we have ahead first."

I approached the place from the rear, peering in through the narrow openings between the upright poles. The light was so poor I was not able to perceive much, but did succeed in fully convincing myself that the dismal shack was unoccupied. The door stood unlatched and I pushed it open. A single glance served to reveal everything the place contained. Without doubt it had been the late abode of Indians, who, in all probability, had fled hastily to join Black Hawk in his foray up Rock river. What interested me most was a small bit of jerked deer meat which still hung against an upright and the rude stone fireplace in the center of the hut, with an

opening above to carry away the smoke.

I had found during the night a fair supply of hard bread in my saddle-bag, and now, with this additional gift of Providence, felt assured, at least, of one sufficient meal.

"It is all right, Tim, there is no one here. An old Indian camp with nothing but a hunk of jerked deer meat left behind. Eloise, gather up some of that old wood yonder and build a fire. Kennedy and I will look after Miss Beaucaire."

It was bright day by this time, the red of the rising sun in the sky, and I could trace the radius of swamp land stretching about us on every hand, a grim, desolate scene even in the beauty of that clear dawn. We had been fortunate enough to approach the spot along the only available pathway which led to this little oasis, and a more secure hiding place it would be difficult to find. I felt almost at ease for the present and satisfied to rest here for several hours.

Tim assisted me in unstrapping Eloise, and lifting her from the saddle, and, as she made no effort to help herself, the two of us carried her to a warm, sunny spot beside the wall of the hut. Her cramped limbs refused to support her body, and her eyes, then open, yet retained that vacant look so noticeable from the first. The only change was in the puzzled way with which she stared into our faces, as though memory might be struggling back, and she was vaguely endeavoring to understand.

Tim led the horses away and staked them out where they could crop the rich, dewy grass. After removing the saddles he followed the mulatto girl into the hut, and I could hear the murmur of their voices. I endeavored to address Eloise, seeking thus to awaken her to some sense of my presence, but she merely smiled meaninglessly, leaned her head wearily back against the poles and closed her eyes.

It was a poor meal enough, although it sufficed to dull hunger and yield us some strength. Eloise succeeded in choking down a few morsels, but drank thirstily. It was pitiful to watch her, and to mark the constant effort she was making to force the return of memory. I had Eloise bathe her face with water and while, no doubt, this refreshed her somewhat she only rested her head back on my coat, which I had folded for a pillow, and again closed her heavy eyes. The negroess appeared so tired I bade her lie down and sleep, and soon after Tim also disappeared. I remained there alone, guarding the woman I loved.

How were we to escape, burdened by this helpless girl, from pursuit, which perhaps had already started from Yellow Banks? At all hazards I must now prevent this dazed, stupefied woman from ever again falling into the power of Joe Kirby. That was the one fact I knew. I would rather kill her with my own hand, for I was convinced the fellow actually possessed a legal right, which I could not hope to overthrow. However it had been accomplished, through what villainy, made no odds—she was his wife, and could only be released through process of law. He could claim her, hold her in spite of me, in spite of herself. No influence I might bring to bear would save her now from this contamination. It would all be useless, a thing for laughter. Her signature—of which Kirby had boasted—and the certificate signed by the dead Gaskins, would offset any possible efforts I might put forth. There remained no hope except through flight; outdistancing our pursuers; finding a route to safety through the wilderness which they would never suspect.

I must find an unknown path, an untraveled trail. Our only hope lay in baffling pursuit, in getting far beyond Kirby's grip. I dragged the map

out from its silk wrapping and spread it forth on the ground between my knees. It was the latest government survey, given me when I first departed for the North, and I already knew every line and stream by heart.

I became so interested in the problem as to entirely forget her presence, but, when I finally lifted my head, our eyes met, and I instantly read in the depths of hers the dawning of recognition.

"Who are you?" she breathed incredulously, lifting herself upon one hand. "Oh, surely I know—Lieutenant Knox! Why, where am I? What has happened? Oh, God! you do not need to tell me that! But you; I cannot understand about you. They—they said you died."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Bleak House, Broadstairs, where Charles Dickens lived for some time, is for sale by auction.

Remained There Alone, Guarding the Woman I Loved.

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OUT O' LUCK

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He Went to L.

The late P. T. Barnum delighted to tell of his thousand and one amusing experiences, especially some that happened during his first tour of England with "the greatest show on earth." One of the best is a joke on the "champion humbugger" himself. Barnum, on a leisure evening, bought a ticket to an English music hall. Imagine his keen delight as he heard the usher, as he took the tickets of the people ahead say: "Letter Hay, first row; letter Hee, fifth row; letter Hoff, sixth row; letter High, ninth row," and then, in response to Barnum's inquiry, "Where do I go?" he said: "You go to Hell, sir."

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Too Soft.

For a week I slept every night with gloves on my hands and used cold cream to soften my fingers. I wanted to meet a girl all the college boys were praising and show her I was a "gentleman."

"When she was introduced to me at a fraternity dance she thrust out her hand and gripped me hard. She couldn't conceal her disgust.

"Gracious, what a hand for a man!" she said, telling those around us that I had a palm like an infant's. Sicker I never felt in all my life. The cold cream had done its dirty work.—Chicago Tribune.

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Eating Grass in Armenia. Everybody (in Alexandropol, Armenia), as though it were the most natural thing in the world to do, was eating grass. The women nearly all carried little bunches of grass in their aprons or tied up in loops on their ragged skirts, while one saw grasses sticking out of most men's pockets. There was a constant munching that really seemed more awful to me than the abject surrender to the inevitable that I was compelled so frequently to witness.—Eleanor Franklin Egan in the Saturday Evening Post.

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Maybe Not.

"Why don't we get any more Turkish rhapsodies?" "Well, they ain't got nothing to rhapsodize over, I take it."—Louisville Courier-Journal.